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ABSTRACT

Designed for use by elementary school teachers, this newsletter issue contains activities to help children acquire reading skills while handling various types of reading materials. Following a description of the shared book experience, an approach to teaching reading that incorporates modelling, recreational reading, and instructional reading, the newsletter outlines 20 activities that can be integrated into formal reading instruction. The activities are as follows: (1) make your own big books, (2) innovating on stories, (3) string sentences, (4) Directed Reading and Thinking Activity, (5) write your own adventure, (6) predicting with pictures, (7) retelling, (8) structured retelling, (9) spot the pronoun, (10) meet the people, (11) comparing stories, (12) recalling events, (13) recalling information, (14) brainstorming, (15) ReQuest, (16) finding a starting point, (17) read to answer the question, (18) making up the questions, (19) paired tutoring, and (20) the reading conference. (HOD)

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20 Reading Activities. Primary English Notes (P.E.N.) 44

Andrea Butler

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20 Reading Activities

- What are the basic skills of reading?
- How can these skills best be learned?

This *PEN* offers an answer to the first question and 20 activities which teachers are finding effective in helping children to acquire the basic skills of reading while handling various types of materials.

The Basic Skills of Reading?

Recent research into what proficient readers do has yielded insights into ways to help learner-readers succeed.

As proficient readers, we first of all expect that what we read will make sense. For example, when we read the sentence, 'He wanted a glass of _____', we can predict that the missing word is 'milk', 'water', 'lemonade' or some other drink. It is our background knowledge of what goes in a glass plus our knowledge of how language works that helps us guess.

If we are shown a preceding sentence, it may help us to predict even more accurately, e.g. 'James was very hot. He wanted a glass of _____'. Now our options are limited to 'water' or 'beer' or some other *refreshing* drink. Again our background experience has helped us.

If we are shown that the initial consonant is 'w', we are almost sure the word is 'water'.

So what have we done?

Initially we sampled the text and predicted, then we sampled some more text and modified our prediction, and finally we sampled the word itself and confirmed our predictions.

Our sampling-predicting-testing-confirming has made use of:

- *Semantic cues* (prior knowledge of the subject and the world);
- *Syntactic cues* (knowledge of how language works);
- *Grapho-phonetic cues* (knowledge of letter-sound relationships).

All proficient readers make use of these three cueing systems to make sense of print. The skills required for using sampling-predicting-testing-confirming are the basic skills of reading.

How can these skills best be learned? (See p. 2)



Shared Book Experience

How Can Reading Skills Best Be Learned?

I believe classroom time for reading is best spent in three ways:

1. *Modelling.* Children need to be read to *every* day. They need to be exposed to, and immersed in, models of different kinds of text.
2. *Recreational Reading.* Children need time to read for an extended period every day. This may take the form of 'Sustained Silent Reading' (explained in PETA's 'This Works for Me', p. 43) or any other form of free reading. It is a time for them to ENJOY books and other reading materials of their own choosing.
3. *Instructional Reading.* Children need some guided activities within the whole reading context. These need to be chosen carefully by the teacher and used at a time when they are meaningful for the children.

These three ways are derived from Dr Brian Cambourne's 7-point statement on 'Translating Learning Theory into Classroom Practice'.

This *PEN* first describes 'Shared Book Experience,' an approach to teaching reading which incorporates Modelling, Recreational Reading and Instructional Reading. It then goes on to outline 20 activities which can be integrated into the Reading Program during Instructional Reading. The concentration here on Instructional Reading activities is not intended to suggest that more time should be spent on them. Indeed, *Modelling and Recreational Reading are more important*, and time spent on them should be highly valued by the teacher.

One Effective Approach for Teaching Reading:

Shared Book Experience

This is a powerful and increasingly popular approach for making reading both pleasurable and meaningful. It is also an effective tool for teaching both reading and writing, whether to older readers, failing readers or beginners.

Suitable Stories

Books that bring the shared experience to life usually have these qualities:

- impact and excitement;
- a good story-line;
- interesting pictures that support the text;
- RHYME, RHYTHM and REPETITION.

That is, stories which entice readers to participate actively (see some recommended collections below).

Shared Book Experience has three main phases:

• Phase 1: Read a Story

The teacher reads a story dramatically to the whole class, showing obvious delight in both the story-line and the language. The model set by the teacher is vital. An enlarged copy of the story will ensure that every child can see both text and pictures.

Seven Conditions for Translating Language Learning Theory into Classroom Practice

In an address to the PETA-ETA Conference in May 1983 Dr Brian Cambourne of the University of Wollongong argued that seven conditions which operate when children are learning to talk must also be present when they are learning to write and read in the classroom:

1. **Immersion.** From the moment children are born, meaningful spoken language washes over and surrounds them. They are immersed in a flood of language.
2. **Demonstration.** In the process of learning to talk children receive thousands and thousands of demonstrations or models of spoken language being used in functional and meaningful ways.
3. **Expectation.** Adults who 'teach' children to talk have the expectation that their children *will* ultimately learn to talk. These expectations are picked up by learners, who respond accordingly.
4. **Responsibility.** Children are left to take responsibility for what they learn about speaking. Each child chooses what to attend to, what to ignore, what to master.
5. **Approximations.** Young learners are not expected to display full blown oral competence from the beginning. Parents actually reward children not for being 'right', but for being 'close'.
6. **Employment.** Plenty of opportunity to practise is provided — not, say, two twenty minute periods per week.
7. **Feedback.** Learners are given feedback about their attempts to use the medium, feedback that is non-threatening, informative, meaning-centred.

Following the text with a pointer ensures that the children can see exactly what the teacher is reading. In this way, concepts of print are being demonstrated within a deeply meaningful context.

After reading, allow time for spontaneous reactions and comments. If necessary, brief questioning may follow in a relaxed, unpressured manner.

Next invite the children to participate by joining in with a catchy refrain, a chant or a repetitive phrase.

The emphasis of this first phase is on reading for meaning and enjoyment. It will be necessary for the teacher to have introduced several stories in this way before proceeding to Phase 2.

• Phase 2: Read the Story Again

The children choose a favourite story for the teacher to re-read. Often the same story is read again and again.

During this reading there are opportunities for teaching the following:

1. Reading is for meaning... always!
2. Prediction ('What will happen next?').
3. Conventions of print (front cover, back cover, title, left to right, one to one correspondence of spoken and written word).

Continued on page 3.

20 Reading Activities

20 Activities for Instructional Reading

1. Make Your Own Big Books

This activity for making your own big books and wall stories can integrate oral and written comprehension, retelling, sequencing, art/craft, and meaningful group talk. These big books can then be used for Shared Book Experience if the stories are suitable.

1. Children choose a favourite story from the library, the shared book collection, group experience books, or a privately owned book. (They might even choose an outstanding story one of them has written.)
2. The teacher (or an older child) copies each page (or paragraph) of text onto blank pieces of paper (50 cm x 30 cm approx.), taking care to duplicate exactly the original spacing and chunking of words.
3. Re-read the story.
4. Give each child one page to illustrate, using paint, crayons, collage, etc. As the child creates the picture, ask relevant questions to ensure that the picture adequately illustrates the text.
5. Come together as a group to put the pictures and the text together, all the children joining in to solve the problems of sequencing and organising.
6. Hang sequenced pages as a wall story at child-height.
7. Re-read it often. After about one week, staple the pages together as a big book, adding a cover and a title page.

Continued from page 2.

4. Self-correction (using meaning clues, pictures, sentence structure, and letter detail).
5. Conventions of punctuation (.,?!“”).
6. Sight vocabulary (in the context of a sentence).
7. Letter-sound relationships (in the context of a word).
8. Intonation patterns and expression (thus eliminating word-by-word reading!).

Capitalise on the teachable moment: The teacher can plan one or two teaching points which are clearly demonstrated in the text of the story. But if the children indicate alternative needs or interests — capitalise on this ‘teachable moment’.

• Phase 3: Read Independently

This phase involves the children themselves in reading and re-reading the stories introduced during Phase 1, but now in small book format. Each child can choose favourite books from a Book Box¹ and read them at his or her own pace during the many opportunities provided throughout the week.

Recommended collections include: Ashton's Read-it-Again series; Ashton's Shaggy Dog Tales; Bill Martin's Instant Readers; Nelson's 'Time for a Rhyme' and 'Time for a Number Rhyme'; Rigby's 'Story Box' (Read-togethers and Other Selected Stories). Many picture books, songs and rhymes are also suitable.

¹The Book Box is a box containing multiple copies of previously introduced stories. It can be for a group or an individual. Everything included should be at the child's independent reading level. The collection should be changed constantly.

2. Innovating on Stories

This activity enhances children's reading and writing by providing a variety of written models from books. Innovating involves making up a new verse or version of an existing story, song or rhyme. The children are invited to substitute some words in the piece while still following the basic pattern of the original.

Take the following story, called ‘Danger’:

‘Look out for chairs,
They are full of bears.
Look out for boxes,
They are full of foxes.’

An ‘innovation’ on this story by a group of 6 year olds looked like this:

‘Look out for parks,
They are full of sharks.
Look out for trees,
They are full of bees.’

Both the meaning and the rhyming pattern of the original have been maintained.

1. Choose a simple story, rhyme, song or extract that can be readily changed. Those suggested for Shared Book Experience (above) are ideal.
2. Read the story to the children several times. Discuss its particular rhyming, rhythmic or repetitive pattern. Copy out the story to be innovated upon, leaving spaces where you would like children to add their own words. For example, ‘Danger’ would be presented as:
‘Look out for _____,
They are full of _____.
Look out for _____,
They are full of _____.’
Younger children may need teacher guidance. Older children enjoy doing the activity in pairs.
3. Publish and illustrate the children's innovations and use them for further reading.

3. String Sentences

This activity allows children to learn about how language works by experimenting with chunks of text. ‘Strings’ of substituted words, phrases or clauses are suggested by the children and written on the chalkboard or a chart. These can be read, put in a book or on cards.

1. Choose a simple sentence, preferably from the children's own writing.
e.g. ‘The cow was in the paddock.’
 2. Ask the children to provide meaningful substitutes for each of the following three chunks: ‘the cow’, ‘was’, and ‘in the paddock’. List all their suggestions underneath the appropriate chunk.
- | | | |
|-----------|-----------|--------------------|
| The cow | was | in the paddock. |
| The horse | ate | in the shed. |
| A fence | blew over | near the house. |
| The weeds | grew | between the crops. |

Ask them to read each completed sentence.

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- Once there is a 'string' of substitutes for each chunk (about 8-10), read all the possible combinations. Discuss which make sense, which are grammatically correct, and which are nonsense. Explain why.
- Select the nonsense ones and copy them into a book titled 'Silly Sentences'. Invite the children to illustrate it. Cut the pages vertically into three strips to allow the children to mix them up.

e.g. The weeds ate in the shed.

- Alternatively, copy these substitute chunks onto cards so children can create new sentences by moving the cards around.

4. D.R.T.A.

The initials stand for Directed Reading and Thinking Activity. It is a prediction activity which motivates the children to attend very closely to details in the text. Here is a form of it.

- Choose an unfamiliar story that has lots of action. (Adventure, detective or mystery stories are great.)
- Break the story into three or four episodes.
- Work with a small group of six to eight children who have similar reading ability.
- Read the title to the children. Ask: What do you think the story is going to be about?
- The children write down their predictions.
- They read the first sentence only.
- Ask: Was your prediction correct? How do you know? Exactly what confirmed or refuted your prediction? What do you think the story is going to be about now? What do you think will happen next?
- The children again write a prediction.
- They read to the end of an episode. Repeat 7 and 8.
- Continue thus until the story is read.
- Discuss the relative merits of the original story and the children's predictions. (If the children prefer their own predictions they may like to try the following activity.)

5. Write Your Own Adventure

This activity involves writing a personal alternative to an original story by branching off from that story at any point one chooses. The new version can then be published as a book. The 'Choose Your Own Adventure' series provides good models.

6. Predicting with Pictures

A similar procedure to D.R.T.A., this involves the children in predicting and confirming their predictions by using the pictures which accompany a story.

- Discuss cover and title. Predict what the story is going to be about.

- Look at each illustration throughout the text. Predict the whole story.
- Read the text.
- Compare predictions with the actual story.
- Discuss the relevance of the illustrations.

7. Retelling

This activity tests the children's ability to reconstruct the author's message after reading a passage or story. It is perhaps the best guide to comprehension.

- The children read a story silently.
- Ask them to retell the story in their own words. A tape recorder could be used.
- Alternatively, the retelling could be in written form. If this is preferred it is best to allow children to work in pairs as it can be a boring task done alone.
- Check their retellings for cumulative story-line, correct sequence, and main idea.

8. Structured Retelling

This activity is a variation of 7. and is easier to manage with a large group. The children need only generalise in filling the blanks, not attempt to retell the whole story in detail.

- Children read a story silently.
- Give them a skeleton story-outline which provides only connectives.
e.g. 'The Three Billy Goats Gruff':
Once upon a time One day
Then Then Lastly And then
..... lived happily ever after.

9. Spot the Pronoun

This activity is designed to help children understand the 'cohesive ties' which bind written text together. Researchers have found that there is a high correlation between the ability to perceive these cohesive ties and the ability to comprehend.

- Choose a passage that contains several personal pronouns. It is best if this comes from the children's own writing or from a story familiar to them.
e.g. from 'Little Brother's Haircut':
One day, Mum asked Sam to take his little brother to the barber.
'Here's the money for his haircut,' she said. 'If he's good, you can get him a big icecream.'
 - Copy out the passage and underline the pronouns.
 - The children read the passage and identify who or what the pronoun is referring to.
- NB. The further apart the pronoun is from its referent noun, the more difficult the task.

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10. Meet the People

This activity helps higher order comprehension of characters within a story.

1. Choose a story with colourful characters.
2. The children read the story.
3. Make a list of the characters.
4. Children skim through the story to find descriptive phrases of each character to cover: appearance; feelings; characteristics; expressions; attitudes.
5. Children write a description of each character in their own words.
6. Then they may:
 - (a) Choose their favourite characters and pretend to meet them. Write the ensuing conversation.
 - (b) Choose two characters from one or two stories and write a conversation between them.
 - (c) Move their favourite character into the setting of another story. Write what happens.

11. Comparing Stories

This activity develops oral language, critical thinking, appreciation of style, and comprehension of total story-line. Comparison is always difficult, not least literary comparison; so this activity is best for older children who read willingly and widely.

1. Introduce the children to three or more stories (or novels) with a similar plot or theme, e.g. stories about feeling lonely, or coping with death. Young children's picture books could be used to introduce the activity.
2. Children read the stories silently.
3. Compare the story-lines, the style, and the behaviours and reactions of the characters. Discuss in small groups.
4. Children write an original story with a similar plot or theme. Publish.

12. Recalling Events

This small group activity aids recall of a plot-sequence.

1. Hand out a story that has an eventful plot, so that all the children in a group read the same story.
2. Distribute five or six small cards to each child.
3. The children read the story then *close* the book.
4. Each writes recalled main events on the cards.
5. In pairs, compare the events they have listed.
6. In pairs, sequence them, discarding unnecessary cards.
7. As a whole group, re-read the passage and check for omitted events.
8. Children use the cards to write a summary of the passage. This is best done in pairs.

P.E.N. 44 was written by Andrea Butler who, after teaching primary classes in Victoria, Queensland and New South Wales and some years as a language consultant, has taken up a consultancy position with a major publishing firm.

13. Recalling Information

This is a variation of 'Recalling Events'. The children read an expository piece of writing, e.g. a description of a bird, its appearance, behaviour, habitat, etc. An extract from an encyclopedia would be suitable. Children follow the same procedure as in 12. but record one piece of information on each card instead of an event, e.g. a magpie is black and white. The cards are then categorised into meaningful groups rather than sequenced. As with 12., a summary can be written.

14. Brainstorming

This activity is useful for summarising non-fiction material. Initially, the children will need teacher guidance at all stages but with practice they will be able to use this strategy in small groups or pairs without the teacher.

1. Distribute a brief passage of informational text.
2. Set the purpose by saying: 'I want you to read to remember everything you can.'
3. After reading, close the book, or turn over the sheet.
4. As a group, brainstorm everything that can be remembered. (Teacher scribes. No discussion, explanations, comments or questions allowed yet.)
5. When finished, study the list to find repetitions, inconsistencies, and omissions.
6. Categorise the information.
7. Construct an outline using the categories.
8. Alternatively, summarise the passage.

15. Re Quest

Re Quest is an activity for teaching children *how* to ask questions.

1. Choose a passage or a story. Copy onto an overhead transparency.
2. Reveal the title. Ask the children to predict what the passage could be about. List the answers.
3. Reveal only the first sentence.
4. The children *ask the teacher* questions about the story thus far. The teacher answers using only the information provided in the text. If the text does not state the answer explicitly, the teacher should say, 'I don't know; it doesn't say. Ask me a *Do-you-think question*.' Then the teacher can explain what he or she thinks.
5. Read next sentence. Repeat step 4. Continue to end.
6. Draw up the following chart with the children to remind them how to ask challenging questions:

FACT: Who? What? Where? How?

INQUIRY: Why? Do you think...?

VOCABULARY: What does _____ mean?

EXPERIENCE: Have you ever...?

20 Reading Activities

16. Finding a Starting Point

This activity helps comprehension of difficult material by reminding children what they already know about the subject before they read. It also gives a purpose for reading because it highlights the things they don't already know.

1. Introduce the topic of the passage or book.
2. Children brainstorm what they know about that topic.
3. Group and categorise the information. Point out inconsistencies and vague ideas.
4. Write statements under the following headings: *What We Know; What We Need to Find Out.*
5. Children read the passage or book.
6. Re-examine items on the chart: Were we right? Do we now know anything more?
7. Add new information to the chart.
8. Use information to summarise the passage or as a guide to future reading.

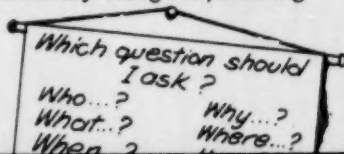
17. Read to Answer the Question

This is an alternative to 'Brainstorming'. The same procedure is followed but each child or pair is responsible for finding the answer to just one question. The question may be made up by the teacher or the children prior to reading.

18. Making Up the Questions

This activity trains children in deciding their own purpose for reading. It helps them to anticipate what might be in the text, and therefore their ability to predict and comprehend is enhanced.

1. Play Re Quest using different types of material: narrative, historical, scientific, biographical, etc.
2. Choose a piece, e.g. a biographical extract.
3. Show the children the following list of questions: What was the story about? Who is this piece about? Why do we remember them? What happened? When did it happen? When were they born? What did they do? How did the main character feel? What happened in the end? Where did it happen? Why did it happen? Why were they famous?
4. Ask the children to identify the questions that would be relevant if we wanted to find out about this person.
5. Read the piece.
6. Answer the questions selected from the above list. Repeat the activity with different types of materials. Remind the children to use this strategy before they research a topic in the library. *Hang the following chart in the room.*



19. Paired Tutoring

Link an infants class with a primary class. The little ones come once or twice a week and each child is partnered by a primary child who has strenuously practised in preparation for reading aloud and, if necessary, for explaining a story. This is a two-way winner, for the older child knows that the practice has a purpose and the younger feels that reading is a significant activity. The infants children may also bring pieces to read to their mentors. If this activity is launched in second or third term when the respective classes have accumulated a large number of 'published' pupil-authored books, these can be a major resource for reading aloud — linking writing and reading and promoting both in a beneficial way.

20. The Reading Conference

The 'conference approach' to the teaching of writing has become popular in many Australian schools in the 1980s. Its key procedure, a discussion or consultation between child and teacher — that is, a 'conference' — can be used with equally good effect to promote a child's interest in reading.

Here are some possible occasions for a conference.

1. Mainly, the conference should be an opportunity for a child to tell why a book has been found interesting, amusing, significant, etc. (The teacher responds by showing interest in what the child says.)
2. After a child has expressed opinions about a book, the teacher may ask a question or two about it.
3. A child may ask for a conference during the reading of a book because he or she is experiencing difficulties in reading or comprehending it and needs the teacher's help.
4. The teacher may call a child into conference in order to discover what the child is making of the reading that is taking place.
5. The teacher may encourage children to '... get ideas for writing from your reading'. When a child has read a book, the routine could follow whereby the child discusses with the teacher an idea for writing a story along the lines of some part of the book.
6. A conference may also take place when a child is unsure of what to read next. The teacher listens, asks about the child's taste in reading, makes suggestions.

Shortage of time keeps the conferences brief, yet teachers find that a good deal can usually be accomplished in a few minutes. The essence lies in giving each child full personal attention during those few minutes — with good effects for the child's self-esteem and valuing of reading.

The one-to-one conference of teacher and child can be extended to other forms, in particular by encouraging 'peer conferencing' (child with child) and 'group conferencing' (teacher with a small group of pupils, all of whom have read a given book or different books about a similar theme or topic).

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